



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
St. Louis District®

News Release

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Mississippi River Falling to Near-Record Lows at St. Louis

St. Louis, Mo. – The results of a dry fall and below-normal temperatures in mid-January throughout the upper river basin are combining to bring near-historic low water marks to the Mississippi River in the St. Louis area.

The St. Louis gage stood at –3.5 feet Tuesday morning, January 14, 2003, and based on National Weather Service projections (NWS), will surrender another two feet, descending to –5.5 feet, its shallowest depth since 1989.

The “zero” mark on the St. Louis gage is an arbitrary benchmark established during a period of low water in 1863. At that mark, the navigation channel maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has an approximate depth of a minimum of 12.5 feet at St. Louis.

The fact that navigation has continued as the river has fallen so drastically is a Corps of Engineers success story for 2002-2003. River engineering structures put in place during the last decade and maintenance dredging carried out by the Corps St. Louis District’s Dredge Potter have resulted in a navigation channel that has enabled the barge industry to continue to operate, for the most part, with little or no unusual measures throughout the fall and early winter.

The St. Louis District is activating its Dredge Potter, which will be available toward the end of the week to work to keep the channel open, but this capability may be reduced if the river continues to fall and/or ice forms in the St. Louis Harbor.

In a series of teleconferences between Corps, NWS, U.S. Coast Guard and navigation industry representatives, measures to help keep the navigation channel operating have been agreed to by all parties.

The Coast Guard Captain of the Port (COTP) St. Louis, in conjunction with the COTP Paducah, Ky., issued a safety advisory today, due to falling water levels on the Upper Mississippi River. The advisory covers 185 miles of the river from Cairo, Ill., to the Port of St. Louis. The advisory requests that all northbound tows be limited to a total of 24 barges configured six long by four wide. Within this tow configuration, the number of loaded barges is restricted to 15. Loaded barges are requested to be configured five long by 3 wide. The advisory also requests that all southbound tows be limited to a total of 20 barges, with the heaviest barges placed to the rear and center of the tow. The advisory further asks that all barges be loaded to a draft of not more than eight feet, six inches. The advisory will remain in effect until conditions warrant change.

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add 1-1-1 Mississippi River Falling

The Coast Guard will also reset buoys marking the channel to redefine the 9-foot depth navigation channel, as necessary.